

INTERVIEW with Paul Hurley

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Paul, could you describe *Untitled Actuation, March 2010* for those who didn't see the piece?

I was doing a series of actions over about 45 minutes using a selection of materials that I have used before, but that I've also appropriated from classic action art aesthetics – metal buckets, earth, eggs, felt and water. I made a series of sincere, embodied actions that tap into energies or ways of being shamanistic – going through rights of transformation and endurance but simultaneously queering them in a way with other aesthetics and critical frames. I'm really interested in exploring the processional transformations that those works can effect.

I felt your slow, blind, procession through the crowd with the wooden pole you used for support strongly evoked a sceptre – your procession almost became a parting of earth. You used very simple objects throughout the piece: a wooden pole, two metal buckets, eggs, felt and they were repeatedly transformed and translated through your ritualistic actions.

I guess there is that classic thing of using an everyday object. What becomes interesting to me is how simple interactions with those objects as I engage with the audience act as a gentle provocation to shape images, feelings and sensations. The audience ties those sensations together in a reactional response that I hope is still quite sensitive, vulnerable even, reflecting what I am experiencing.

The vulnerability and sensitivity brought a real lightness to that Arch that I felt for the first time in that space this year. You gave us time to put elements together; time to process these images and engage with personal memory and experience.

The slowness is important. If I were to run into the crowd holding a stick with a bucket on my head, that would be terrifying! To enter the crowd as I did in this slow and measured way is risky for me, and it breaks down my relationship with the audience.

That parting of the crowd was an important part of my experience of your piece. Not only did it break down the natural boundary that formed around you as we entered the space but I felt you were ploughing land, with the stilettos puncturing the earth and preparing for the sewing of seeds. Standing tall in the bucket seemed a natural progression from that!

Actually, on the standing in the bucket of earth - I only did once before and that was really the first time I started this series of work. It is interesting that you read it in that way since that was very much about this Ritual of Spring based on a Jewish Festival of a 'New Year for Trees', concerned with rebirth and life. There are many Jewish New Year rituals that are implicit in this piece.

Did this piece grow from an existing body of work?

I spent about five or six years making a series of "becoming animal" works, literalising Deleuze and Guattarian ideas of becoming animal. I did about fourteen or fifteen of those works but I became concerned that those works were becoming formulaic and it was my thing to develop as a "becoming animal" artist! About eighteen months ago, I began these current explorations - a much more open series. This actuation at NRLA is one of six or eight performances that I've done as riffs on a similar theme – using similar actions and interactions with the audience.

What have you seen at the NRLA this year, and what are you looking forward to seeing tomorrow?

I think Esther Ferrer was possibly my highlight this year, simply because it was one of the best performance lectures that I've seen. It really worked, summing up that relationship between theory and practice with such beauty and humour – I was really pleased to have seen that. Tomorrow, looking forward to Boris Neislony and Silke Mansholt.